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Working methods of the Executive Board

I. Introduction

1. During 2002, the Executive Board held informal discussions on its overall working methods, including arrangements for field visits. These issues were again discussed in 2003, when the need to revise the terms of reference[1] for the field visits became apparent, in order to take into account the question of joint field visits with members of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP). These issues were discussed by the Bureau following the annual session of 2003, when some delegations expressed interest in further discussion on the Board's working methods at the second regular session of 2003.

2. The present report has been prepared by the secretariat to facilitate those discussions by: (a) summarizing some of the points raised about the Board's overall working methods, as a way of facilitating any discussions on these issues; and (b) providing updated guidelines for the field visits which take into account recent decisions by the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board on joint field visits,[2] and for which the Board's approval is sought.

II. Working methods of the Executive Board: summary of issues raised

3. The following issues have been raised by various delegations during a series of informal discussions of the working methods of the Executive Board, including a presentation by the President of the WFP Executive Board, at the annual session of

* E/ICEF/2003/11.

[1] The original terms of reference for field visits were approved by the Executive Board in decision 1992/32.

[2] Decisions 2003/15 (DP/2003/26) and 2002/23 (DP/2003/2).

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2002, on a process launched by the WFP Board to improve its functioning and working methods. The points are summarized below, together with comments by the secretariat on progress made to date in those areas.

4. The members of the **Bureau** play a vital role in facilitating the work of the Executive Board by coordinating consultations within and between their respective regional groups, and by working with the secretariat between sessions on ongoing issues of concern. The President also maintains contact with the Presidents of the Executive Boards of the other funds and programmes with regard to joint meetings and related issues.

5. **Informal consultations** have been cited by Board members as an important forum for discussing issues, and as helping delegations to prepare for the formal Board sessions. The secretariat agrees completely that informal consultations are key to briefing delegations, listening to their concerns and building consensus, as seen by the successful consultations and briefings (for each regional group) on the recovery policy held prior to the annual session of 2003. Similar consultations are under way to discuss the issue of allocation of regular resources prior to the second regular session of 2003. In addition, prior to each session, the secretariat normally organizes pre-session briefings for each regional group to discuss the issues on the agenda. When possible, the secretariat will make advance copies of relevant documents available for the consultations. Alternatively, delegations will be provided other information materials if the final document is not ready.

6. The timely availability, in languages, of high-quality **documentation** continues to be an issue of concern, as does the large number of documents produced and the burden this places on delegations, especially those with small Missions to the United Nations. The secretariat has been addressing the issue through several avenues:

(a) The secretariat continues to work closely with the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) to ensure that all documents are submitted by the assigned slot date and meet all requirements for length (a maximum of 8,500 words/16 pages per document). Waivers are required for documents that exceed that requirement, and for 2003, waivers have been requested only for certain mandatory financial reports and for the annual report of the Executive Director. If documents are submitted on time and are within the page limit, DGACM issues them in languages four weeks prior to the start of the session;

(b) Advance copies of documents, in their original language versions, have been made available on the UNICEF extranet site at least six weeks prior to each session. Plans are under way to post the advance copies on the UNICEF web site (www.unicef.org);

(c) To avoid overburdening delegations with written reports, throughout 2002 and 2003 the secretariat has been delivering a series of oral reports on a variety of topics. Because they do not have the long lead time of written reports, the oral reports include more up-to-date information. They are also in line with the Secretary-General's proposals to streamline reports contained in his report, *Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change* (A/57/387). The oral reports generally have been well received, although delegations have requested that the secretariat provide advance information on relevant policy issues. Copies of relevant material will be made available prior to each session;

(d) Each year, at the second regular session, the Executive Board adopts its programme of work for the coming year, based on a draft prepared by the secretariat which in turn is based on previous Board decisions, requests from delegations and consultation with the secretariat and Bureau. The draft programme also indicates whether the reports will be written or oral. This is discussed and can be amended by the Board. In addition, after each session, the secretariat discusses with the Bureau any requests for additional agenda items or reports that resulted from that session.

III. Proposed guidelines for the field visits of the UNICEF Executive Board

7. The proposed guidelines have been prepared taking into account comments made by delegations during the Executive Board's discussions on field visits in 2002 and 2003, and the recent decisions of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board on joint field visits. They are intended to be a flexible frame of reference for preparing field visits, in the context of the particular features of the relevant UNICEF country programme and the programmes of the other agencies taking part in joint field visits.

A. Selection of countries

8. In principle, there shall be two field visits each year, including one joint visit, if agreed upon by the Bureaux of the three Executive Boards (UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP). If there is a joint visit, the members of each Executive Board will make separate visits to projects of their respective agencies.

9. The countries to be visited each year shall be selected at the end of the previous year by the Bureau, based on information provided by the secretariat and with the concurrence of the countries concerned. The destinations for joint field visits shall be agreed upon by the three Bureaux, in consultation with the respective secretariats.

B. Purpose and scope of the visits

10. The purpose of the visits is to: (a) allow Board members to observe UNICEF field operations and the work of the United Nations country team; (b) help them to understand the relationship of the UNICEF country programme to national development priorities, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), bilateral development assistance and other relevant frameworks; (c) provide insight into the implementation of UNICEF policies and strategies at field level; and (d) discuss the impact and results of UNICEF programmes with government and non-government counterparts at national, local and community levels, if possible.

11. The team shall study and review all facets of programming and programme delivery in each country visited, including advocacy and policy dialogue with the Government; the programme approach adopted; decentralization of financial and administrative authorities; decentralized field operations at subnational levels; working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the principle and practice of flexible response to emerging issues and changing situations; social mobilization

and programme communication; and involvement and working relationship with the United Nations country team and other development partners, etc. The visit shall highlight the dynamics of UNICEF programme operations.

12. Issues to be covered may include:

(a) The country programme cycle (situation analysis/Common Country Assessment (CCA), preparation of country programme, midterm reviews) and results achieved against objectives;

(b) Effectiveness of communication between UNICEF and national and local counterparts, the United Nations country team and bilateral partners;

(c) Comparative advantages, impact, results and sustainability of UNICEF-supported programmes;

(d) Emergency response capacity;

(e) Decentralization;

(f) United Nations system coordination;

(g) Relevance of Executive Board and decisions;

(h) Linkages with the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan, the CCA/UNDAF, the Millennium Development Goals and other relevant frameworks.

13. The UNICEF Representative shall have the opportunity to suggest additional issues.

14. The team shall visit a representative sample of programme/project interventions and shall spend as much time as possible outside the capitals.

C. Team contacts

15. Within the framework for the field visit, the team shall meet a representative sample of participants in UNICEF programme operations, including:

(a) UNICEF field staff (international and national Professionals, General Service);

(b) Members of the United Nations country team;

(c) National counterparts at national, subnational and local levels;

(d) National decision makers who work in areas relevant to UNICEF cooperation;

(e) Representatives of civil society who work with UNICEF (e.g., mass media, religious leaders, community-based organizations, professional organizations, children's groups);

(f) International and national NGOs;

(g) Donors, including bilateral cooperation agencies, the World Bank, etc.

16. The visits shall, to the extent possible, be conducted as working visits for study and dialogue, with courtesy and protocol calls kept to a minimum.

D. Participation

17. Each team shall comprise six members of the Executive Board, two from the Western European and Others group of States, with one each from the African, Asian, Central and Eastern European, and Latin American and Caribbean groups of States. In selecting team members, the regional groups of the UNICEF Executive Board should bear the following criteria in mind. The nominee should:

(a) Not be a national of the countries to be visited;

(b) Be familiar with UNICEF work, i.e., an official who has been dealing with UNICEF matters, whether from the capital or the Permanent Mission to the United Nations;

(c) Be reasonably certain of his/her participation in subsequent meetings of the Executive Board.

E. Joint visits

18. Joint visits should focus on themes of common interest to the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, such as the UNDAF, the work of the United Nations country team on the Millennium Development Goals and/or other relevant cross-cutting themes for discussion at subsequent joint meetings of the Executive Boards, while at the same time allowing members of the Boards to visit projects of their respective agencies.

19. The countries to be visited by the joint teams will be selected by the three Bureaux, in consultation with the respective secretariats. Because the joint visits can place a considerable burden on the host Governments, this will be taken into account in deciding on the destinations and duration of the joint visits. The Bureaux and secretariats will consider the possibility of rotating secretariat responsibility for coordinating the joint visits.

F. Financing

20. Members from industrialized countries shall bear all their expenses, while the expenses incurred by members from developing countries shall be borne by the UNICEF support budget.

G. Length of the visit

21. The team will spend at least five working days in each country visited, and shall visit not more than two countries per visit.

H. Preparations and communications

22. In advance of the visit, the field offices concerned shall provide all the background materials required such as the schedule of the visit, the situation analysis, the programme plan of action for the year and a summary of the UNDAF,

striking a balance between providing information needed to render the visits meaningful and not overburdening team members with excessive documentation.

I. Briefing, debriefing and trip report

23. Prior to the team's departure, UNICEF headquarters may provide a briefing on policy background and issues, as appropriate.

24. All visits will begin with a thorough briefing by the country office and an informal question-and-answer session, followed by first-round meetings with government counterparts and visits to project sites.

25. The last day of each visit will be devoted to debriefing, including a round-table discussion with government counterparts and other partners, and an overall review of the visit.

26. The participants shall write a brief informal report for discussion at the subsequent session of the Executive Board. The team shall designate a rapporteur who will work with the Office of the Secretary of the Executive Board in drafting the report. During the visit, appropriate time shall be allocated and organizational plans made for the preparation of the report, which should be completed in draft form before the end of the visit.

J. Travel arrangements

27. The UNICEF secretariat will make necessary travel arrangements, as required, in accordance with United Nations standards.